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The Doctrine Of Double Effect In Contemporary Social Protest. Ethical Implications Of Social Media Activism In Romania

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Abstract. This paper[1] examines contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE), while also exploring the role of symbolic participation within social media environments. The research focuses on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, analyzing forms of online engagement such as hashtags, symbolic communication, protest mobilization and audience interaction. Using a qualitative and exploratory approach, the study investigates how digital activism may reflect both humanitarian intentions and unintended consequences within highly visible online spaces. The analysis integrates perspectives from digital activism studies, social protest theory and social media behavior, particularly concepts such as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Paolo Gerbaudo's choreography of assembly. The findings suggest that social media platforms contribute significantly to the visibility and coordination of protest movements, while simultaneously facilitating symbolic forms of participation shaped by visibility, emotional discourse and platform-specific dynamics. Moreover, the paper argues that online engagement may involve unintended consequences such as polarization, hostile interactions and performative behavior. By applying DDE to digital activism within the Romanian context, the study contributes to the growing literature on social media activism, symbolic participation and contemporary socio-political behavior in digital environments.

Keywords: Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE), digital activism, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social protest, Romanian activism.

1. Introduction

Contemporary social protest is no longer limited to physical action and traditional forms of mobilization, as social media platforms are increasingly influencing socio-political life and civic engagement. Consequently, digital activism has become a relevant field of study for understanding contemporary political communication, online participation and user behavior within digital environments. However, the growing visibility of online activism can raise ethical questions regarding the intentions and unintended consequences of digital participation. Therefore, the research questions of this paper are (1) *How can the Doctrine of Double Effect be applied to contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism on social media?* and (2) *How do social media platforms influence symbolic participation within Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism?* The paper contributes to the growing literature on digital activism by combining ethical analysis with perspectives on digital participation and symbolic engagement. Moreover, it

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highlights the importance of examining social media environments in order to better understand contemporary socio-political behavior and patterns of digital participation.

The Romanian context was selected because, although Romania is not directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, growing online engagement within global humanitarian causes has been observed in recent years, particularly pro-Palestinian activism across social media platforms. The research does not aim to provide a political, military or international conflict analysis, nor does it seek to promote or invalidate either the pro-Palestine movement itself or the individuals involved in these forms of activism. Moreover, the paper does not evaluate the legitimacy of the broader political conflict or of the political cause itself. Instead, the analysis adopts an interpretative and analytical perspective focused on observing participation and engagement within social media platforms, as well as the ethical implications associated with these forms of digital activism.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE)

The Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE) has mostly been discussed in fields such as war ethics, political debates, medicine and humanitarian intervention. The doctrine argues that an action that produces both good and harmful consequences can be morally allowed under certain conditions.[2] For the Doctrine of Double Effect to work, it must be possible to clearly distinguish between actions that use harm as a direct means to achieve a goal and actions that produce harm only as a side effect.[3]

Michael Walzer explains DDE as a rule of law that says noncombatants must not be directly targeted at any time. First highlighted by Catholic casuists in the Middle Ages, the doctrine encompasses morality as a central characteristic. Walzer further highlights the morality within the concept, underlining certain conditions which might allow the performance of an act likely to have negative consequences. Moral evaluation of an action depends not only on its outcomes, but also on the nature of the act and the intention behind it. An action must be legitimate or morally neutral, and the actor must aim at a morally acceptable objective rather than at the harmful consequence. Any negative effect should occur as an unintended side effect rather than to achieve the desired result. At the same time, the expected good must be significant enough to justify allowing the harmful outcome.[4]

In moral theory, an action is considered voluntary when it is performed knowingly and intentionally. Lack of knowledge can change how an action is understood. If a person does not know certain details about what they are doing, but would have acted in the same way if they had known, the act can be described as non-voluntary. Non-voluntary acts are actions where external circumstances influence how a person carries out their intentions. In contrast, an action is involuntary when a person would not have acted in that way had they been aware of the real meaning or consequences. Therefore, this distinction shows that knowledge plays a key role in

[2] Lawrence Masek, "Intentions, Motives and The Doctrine of Double Effect", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 240 (2010): 567, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40660454.
[3] Richard Hull, "Deconstructing the Doctrine of Double Effect", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3, no. 2 (2000): 196, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27504131.
[4] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars. A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 151-153.

moral responsibility. However, ignorance doesn't always remove responsibility. For instance, when a person avoids knowing relevant information or chooses not to reflect on the consequences of their action, that ignorance itself can be considered voluntary. Consequently, intention and awareness are key elements in evaluating moral responsibility, which is central to DDE.[5]

The doctrine is tied to the just war theory and, although it is one of the most used formulations in war ethics and international relations studies, it is not without fault. The main problem with it is that it can be too weak in protecting civilians. Harm may be considered acceptable if it is not directly intended, even if the person knows it will likely happen as a side effect of their action. However, critics argue that this is not enough. It is not sufficient for someone to simply not intend to harm civilians; they should also actively try to avoid harming them. The doctrine focuses too much on intention and not enough on the responsibility to reduce damage.[6] Within this debate, Warren S. Quinn explains the role of intention in DDE by introducing the concept of agency. On one hand, in cases of direct agency, the victim's suffering contributes to achieving the goal, making the person part of the strategy. On the other hand, in cases of indirect agency, harm may be anticipated, but it doesn't play a role in achieving the intended outcome. When a person is deliberately involved in a harmful process to serve a purpose, they are treated as a means to that end. This reflects a Kantian understanding of respect for persons: individuals have moral value and should not be used for goals they do not share, especially when their fundamental rights are affected. From this perspective, the structure of intention reveals whether a person is being respected or used instrumentally.[7]

In contemporary social protests, in particular in digital activism, user behavior on social media platforms is often driven by intentions and sustained through consistent engagement. Moreover, social media user behavior may be influenced by social dynamics, socialization and self-presentation.[8] Particularly within digital activism, actions such as sharing content are repeated and socially driven, raising the question of whether they reflect genuine commitment or may suggest forms of performative participation. In consequence, especially as such actions could result in unintended effects, the analysis of intention and consequences through the DDE model is essential for the study of digital activism.

2.2. The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in Digital Environments

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to the feeling of anxiety that arises when individuals believe that others have meaningful or rewarding experiences without them. It is linked to a state of worry, regret and social exclusion, as people fear being left out of events or interactions. Unlike simple regret, which appears after realizing a different choice would have been

[5] Anna Bogatyńska-Kucharska, "The Doctrine of Double Effect: A Comparison of the Version of Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Accounts as Formulated by Joseph Mangan and Joseph Boyle", *Forum Philosophicum* 25, no. 2 (2020): 276, 10.35765/forphil.2020.2502.18.

[6] Steven Lee, "Double effect, double intention, and asymmetric warfare", *Journal of Military Ethics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 234-235, https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570410006183.

[7] Warren S. Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (1989): 349-351, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265475.

[8] Mohammad Mehrabioun, "A multi-theoretical view on social media continuance intention: Combining theory of planned behavior, expectation-confirmation model and consumption values", *Digital Business* 4, no. 1 (2024): 2-3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.digbus.2023.100070.

better, FOMO has a strong social dimension; it is driven by social comparison and by the desire to belong.[9]

FOMO also has a substantial psychological dimension, which can by understood by dividing the concept into two main categories. Firstly, *state-FOMO* represents the feeling of missing moment-to-moment events. It is usually associated with offline individual behavior. Secondly, *trait-FOMO* stands for the sensation of missing out on a rewarding experience. This category is usually associated with the online environment.[10] FOMO existed even before the rise of social media, as individuals often experienced anxiety when they were unable to participate in important events. However, the development of social platforms has significantly intensified FOMO; the constant flow of new content and constant online interaction reduce the possibility of emotional detachment, making FOMO more persistent than in offline contexts.[11] Moreover, in online contexts, individuals may place importance on the lives and opinions of those within their social circle. Therefore, it is important to highlight the connection between FOMO, social media behavior and social influence. Social media provides constant visibility into others' experiences, which encourages comparison and a desire to stay connected and informed. This dynamic creates social pressure to remain involved, contributing to the development of FOMO.[12]

Social media dynamics have been studied more in recent years, given the development of technology and the rise of social platforms. Moreover, social platforms often create visible negative side effects, which have been researched through the lens of psychology and behavioral studies.[13] Particularly, FOMO is considered part of the dark side of social media, and it is linked to compulsive social media use. FOMO can motivate individuals to remain constantly connected to the social media platforms they use, in order to avoid feelings of anxiety about missing experiences that others are having and sharing online. The desire to stay updated reduces the discomfort associated with being left out and encourages continuous engagement within digital spaces.[14]

3. Contemporary Social Protest and Digital Activism

Social protest refers to collective action that arises in response to perceived injustice or unfair decisions made by authorities. These actions aim to challenge existing conditions and

[9] Mohammed Kaddouhah, "An economic definition of 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO)", Finance Research Letters 63, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2024.105344.

[10] Mustafa Saritepeci and Muhammed Furkan Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO for neuroticism, openness and social influence: Investigating the moderating effect", *Personality and Individual Differences* 225 (2024): 1-3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112657.

[11] Julia Brailovskaia and Jürgen Margraf, "From fear of missing out (FoMO) to addictive social media use: The role of social media flow and mindfulness", *Computers in Human Behavior* 150 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107984.

[12] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.

[13] Anushree Tandon, Amandeep Dhir, Shalini Talwar, Puneet Kaur, Matti Mäntymäki, "Social media induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and phubbing: Behavioural, relational and psychological outcomes", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 174 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121149

[14] Fauzia Jabeen, Anushree Tandon, Juthamon Sithipolvanichgulc, Shalini Srivastava, Amandeep Dhir, "Social media-induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue: The role of narcissism, comparison and disclosure", *Journal of Business Research* 159 (2023): 1-2, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113693.

promote social change, including reducing inequality or protecting cultural and social practices.[15] Moreover, protest demonstrations reveal the interest, identities and concerns that shape the political life and public debates.[16] Social protesting can also be understood as a form of social action, which refers to activities that benefit not only individuals, but also the communities they belong to. This concept includes different types of engagement, such as political participation, involvement in social causes, volunteering, community service and participation in civic organizations. In consequence, various terms are often used interchangeably to describe social action, including social participation and civic engagement.[17]

Paolo Gerbaudo argues that social media plays an important role in organizing contemporary protests through what he calls a *choreography of assembly*. According to this perspective, digital platforms help guide and coordinate collective gatherings by directing participants toward specific protest events, providing suggestions about how they should act, constructing emotional narratives that encourage people to come together in public spaces. Based on this view, social media is closely connected to physical protest, as online engagement helps prepare and support face-to-face gatherings, rather than replacing them. Consequently, contemporary forms of protest communication, specifically through social media platforms, applications and messages are linked to the acts of choreography, which require setting the scene and a metaphorical script of people's physical assembling in public spaces.[18]

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design in order to examine the ethical implications of digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect. The research focuses on how intentions, forms of participation and potential unintended consequences are reflected in protest behavior in the digital environment, particularly social media based.

The analytical framework combines elements of political theory, digital media analysis and ethical aspects. An interpretative approach is integrated in order to understand how online actions and behavior can be morally evaluated, depending on intention and outcome. Simultaneously, the research is exploratory, given the fact that the application of DDE to digital activism, particularly in the Romanian context, is relatively limited in the scientific literature. In addition, a descriptive part is included, with the aim of identifying patterns of engagement and categorizing them, before their ethical evaluation. Additionally, while the research does not aim to develop a primary comparative analysis, comparative aspects and observations are integrated in the case study where relevant, especially in relation to different forms of digital content, audience reactions and social media platform-specific elements.

[15] L. Tilly, "Social Protest, History of," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Pergamon, 2001), 14397, https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02726-1.
[16] Peter S. Bearman and Kevin D. Everett, "The structure of social protest, 1961-1983", *Social Networks* 15 (1993): 172, https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/social-networks/vol/15/issue/2.
[17] Orna Braun-Lewensohn, "Sense of Coherence, Values, Youth Involvement, Civic Efficacy and Hope: Adolescents During Social Protest", *Social Indicators Research* 128 (2015): 661, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1049-8.
[18] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* 40.

4.2. Data Selection and Method

The researched material consists of a qualitative selection of social media content related to pro-Palestine digital activism in Romania. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok contribute to shaping political interest and civic engagement in offline, as well as online contexts.[19] Therefore, the dataset includes both text and visual forms of online communication, such as posts, symbolic images, visual materials and user interactions collected from social platforms, specifically Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. In addition, relevant parts of comments sections are also included in order to observe how the audience engages with the content.

It is important to mention that each social media platform functions differently and users are able to engage differently within the various platforms. For example, user behavior on Facebook is shaped by perceived audience and social norms. Facebook has been described as a general-purpose platform where political expression is not the primary function, which may initially discourage users from engaging in explicit political discussions. However, user behavior is shaped by perceived audience and exposure to content. When users observe increasing amounts of political content, social norms may emerge to encourage participation.[20] In the context of this research, these dynamics are relevant, as such social norms can generate pressure to engage, which may be interpreted through concepts such as FOMO and performative participation. Therefore, Facebook was selected as a relevant platform for this study.

Regarding Instagram and TikTok, research suggests that these platforms play an important role in increasing political interest.[21] As a visual-based platform, Instagram has the capacity to influence the formation of shared narratives and to facilitate dissemination of activist messages.[22] In the case of TikTok, the concept of *playful activism* identified in the existing literature is relevant. TikTok's culture of imitation and competition encourages users to participate in political and social issues through the use creation and dissemination of short-form content, more specifically looping videos. Although playful activism transforms the repetitive behavior associated to TikTok into forms of political expression, making participation more accessible and relatable across broader audiences[23], in the context of the present study, this can also be linked to performative forms of engagement. Similar to previous studies examining pro-Palestine digital movements and activism, especially on social platforms, this research applies a purposive sampling approach.[24] This is preferred in order to identify analytically relevant patterns of digital engagement, rather than formulating a quantitative analysis.

The analysis follows a structured process aimed at examining patterns of digital engagement across the selected social media content. The first stage consists of identifying and

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[19] Yunita Sari, Suyato Suyato, Budi Mulyono, Mukhamad Muridono, "Generation Z Instagram Activism: Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement In Indonesia's Democracy", *Journal of Governance and Local Politics* 7, no. 2 (2025): 276, https://journal.unpacti.ac.id/index.php/JGLP/article/view/2307.

[20] Shelley Boulianne, Christian P. Hoffmann, and Michael Bossetta, "Social media platforms for politics: A comparison of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Snapchat, and WhatsApp", *New Media & Society* 27, no. 11 (November 2025): 6024, https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241262415.

[21] Sari *et al.*, "Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement", 276.

[22] Sari *et al.*, "Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement", 275.

[23] Laura Cervi and Tom Divon, "Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges", *Social Media + Society*, special issue "Tiktok and Social Movements" (2023): 1, https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157607.

[24] Cervi and Divon, "Playful Activism", 5.

collecting relevant content from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. The selection of data follows several criteria, including the thematic relevance, as the content must directly reflect the subject of the research. Moreover, the level of visibility and engagement is relevant, as well as the diversity of sources, to ensure analytical diversity. However, the analysis is not based entirely on visibility, virality and reach, as the study prioritizes content that allows the identification of relevant patterns of symbolic communication and other key themes. Following the selection process, the material is examined in order to identify relevant themes and patterns.

Given the nature of social media environments, it is acknowledged that specific factors from social platforms, such as certain algorithms, may influence both the creation and the visibility of the content. However, while these aspects are considered when interpreting the data, they do not represent the primary focus of the analysis. Moreover, as each social media platforms has different dynamics, the selection process varied. In the case of Facebook and Instagram, the analysis focuses mostly on public pages and relatively visible activists accounts and posts connected to the topic. In contrast, in the case of TikTok, activism appears more decentralized and less dependent on clearly identifiable pro-Palestine Romanian activist pages, although limited such pages could be identified. Therefore, the material form TikTok specifically contains also content created by individual users, selected based on thematic relevance and specific social media elements, such as hashtags and visibility.

5. Case Study: Pro-Palestine Digital Activism in Romania

5.1. Context

The research focuses on the forms of digital activism that emerged following the escalation of violence in October 2023, marked by the Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent military response in Gaza. These events were followed by an increase in civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure and large-scale displacement, which contributed to a larger humanitarian crisis. In response to these events, widespread public reactions emerged globally, including protests.[25] In this context, the present study focuses specifically on the social media environment and on the forms of digital engagement that developed in the aftermath of these events. The analysis is aimed at the Romanian context, examining how users engage in pro-Palestine movements across social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Among the most visible activist-oriented pages identified during the research was Romania Palestine Solidarity (RPS), which has accounts across Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. As of May 2026, the page had approximately 26,000 followers on Facebook[26], nearly 19,000 followers on Instagram[27] and around 7,000 followers on TikTok.[28] Another relevant example identified during the analysis was Queers for Palestine Romania (QPR), which has both Facebook

[25] Ali Haif Abbas, Omar Ali Wally Atatfa, Sarah Hazim Mohammed, Enas Naji Kadim, "Legitimation and de-legitimation of American pro-Gaza student protests: A critical discourse analysis", *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 12 (2025): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102076.

[26] Solidaritate România-Palestina, Facebook page, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/RomaniaPalestineSolidarity.

[27] romania_palestine_solidarity, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/romania_palestine_solidarity/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet.

[28] solidaritate_ro_ps, TikTok profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.tiktok.com/@solidaritate_ro_ps.

and Instagram accounts. As of May 2026, the page had approximately 84 followers on Facebook[29] and around 2,300 followers on Instagram.[30] In addition to these more visible activist pages, the analysis also considered smaller pages, public posts and comment sections related to the Palestinian cause in Romanian online environments. Comment sections especially were relevant for observing audience reactions, disagreements, solidarity practices and forms of online polarization surrounding pro-Palestine activism in Romania. Moreover, in the case of TikTok, the analysis relied significantly on content produced by individual users. Compared to Facebook and Instagram, Romanian pro-Palestine activism on TikTok appeared less dependent on more clearly identifiable activist pages and more decentralized through hashtag usage, short-form content and particularly user-generated protest content. Consequently, individual user participation represented an important component of the analyzed material on the platform.

5.2. Forms of Digital Engagement in Pro-Palestine Romanian Online Activism

5.2.1. Hashtags, Slogans and Emotional Discourse

Hashtags are a common element of communication on social media platforms nowadays, especially in the context of online activism. They are used to spread ideas around specific topics and gather similar topic under the same concept, preceded by the hash sign "#".

In the case of Pro-Palestinian Romanian online activism, hashtags were identified as relevant in spreading and highlighting certain ideas across Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Among the frequently used hashtags were *#FreePalestine*, *#Palestine*, *#BoycottIsrael*, *#CeasefireNow.* These hashtags appeared across different forms of content, including protest announcements, visual posts, short-form videos and even comment sections. These elements contributed to the creation of recognizable narratives of solidarity within the Palestinian cause in Romanian online spaces. Through these forms of discourse, the Palestinian cause was framed through emotional and humanitarian narratives aimed at encouraging solidarity, donations and online engagement. Emotional engagement was also visible in audience interactions, for instance, through supportive comments, solidarity messages and emotional reactions expressed through hashtags.

5.2.2. Symbolic Communication

In terms of symbolism and communication, beyond captions and written forms of media engagement, various posts, comments and visual materials relied on symbols, emojis and specific visual elements in order to express solidarity or identification with the movement. These symbols have been observed across the selected social media platforms, often accompanying hashtags, slogans and protest-related content or audience interaction. On the Facebook and Instagram pages of RPS, peace-related symbolism is frequent in both posts and in audience reactions, especially through emojis.

[29] Queers for Palestine România, Facebook page, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/queersforpalestinero.

[30] Queers_for_palestine, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/queers_for_palestine?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet&igsh=ZDNlZDc0MzIxNw==.

One element is the dove symbol, which is commonly used in peace movements. Although the dove is considered the universal symbol of peace, it also carries specific meaning within the Palestinian cause. It is inspired from the Palestinian culture, where it often appears alongside the olive branch, reflecting hope, freedom and peace in a setting characterized by struggle.[31]

Another visible and relevant element is the watermelon symbol, which appeared in posts, captions, comments and even in usernames across different social media platforms (Figure 1). The watermelon emoji was especially visible on TikTok and Instagram, where users integrated it into captions, profile names and comment sections.[32] According to explanations offered by the Romania Palestine Solidarity website, the watermelon became associated with Palestinian resistance and symbolism after public displays of the Palestinian flag were reportedly restricted during the 1967 occupation of Palestinian territories. Consequently, the watermelon became an alternative visual symbol due to the similarity between the colors of the fruit and those of the Palestinian.[33] In addition, this interpretation was also reflected in academic literature about the topic of symbolism and the Palestinian cause. According to Ilhaam Khan, the watermelon has functioned as a visual metaphor for the Palestinian flag, as well as a symbol of solidarity and resistance, specifically within online environments after 2023. In terms of color and shapes, the flag represents three horizontal black lines, as well as well as white and green, and a red triangle. Moreover, besides the colors, the red triangle can be seen as a visual counterpart in the watermelon edge.[34] The increasing visibility of the symbol on social media platforms also illustrates how digital activism relies on simplified and easy to recognize visuals, which spread easily across online communities.

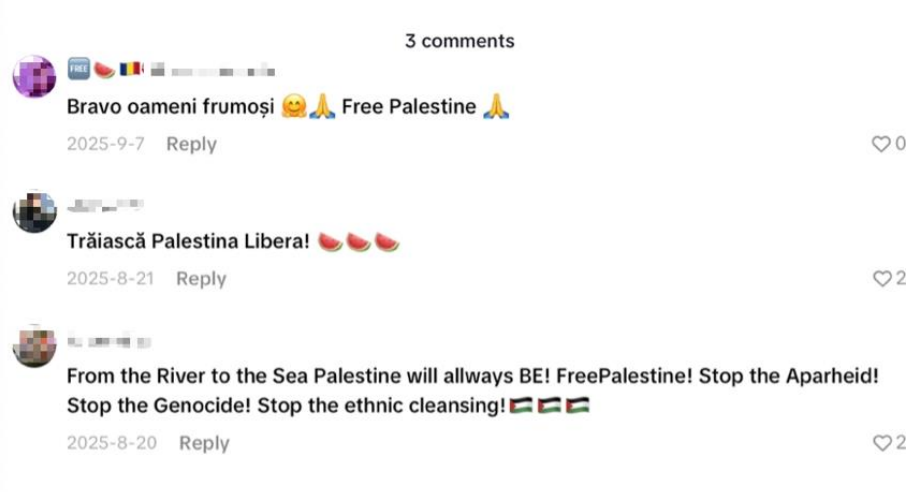
[31] Morgan Totah, "5 Symbols of Palestinian Resistance and Liberation," *Handmade Palestine*, January 14, 2025, https://handmadepalestine.com/blogs/news/5-symbols-of-palestinian-resistance-and-liberation?srsltid=AfmBOoqq4cxsDPZfW7vIdYdSHGdR50Tid2_4d1wc1_ta7rICEBf7bH0R.

[32] Solidaritate_ro_ps, TikTok profile.

[33] Solidaritate România-Palestina, "Cum a devenit pepenele verde un simbol al rezistenței palestiniene," *Solidaritate România-Palestina*, June 11, 2021, https://solidaritateromaniapalestinaorg.wordpress.com/2021/06/11/cum-a-devenit-pepenele-verde-un-simbol-al-rezistentei-palestiniene/.

[34] Ilhaam Khan and Deirdre Pretorius, "Seeds of Freedom: The Watermelon in Palestine Posters," paper presented at the 18th DEFSA Conference, *Design+ Disruptions, Realities, Futures*, September 18-19, 2025, 680-681, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.defsa.org.za/system/tdf/downloads/2017conference/Seeds%2520of%2520freedom.pdf%3Ffile%3D1%26type%3Dnode%26id%3D539%26force%3D1&ved=2ahUKEwjqyfHXp8qUAxWY2QIHHSnGNhkQFnoECBcQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2ivCMdQsMRUErzGnf8lWmf.

Figure 1. TikTok comments expressing solidarity, using the Palestinian flag and the watermelon emoji.



Source: *Solidaritate România-Palestina*, TikTok, accessed May 2026.

5.2.3. Choreography of Assembly and Mobilization

Another pattern identified through the analyzed social media content was the use of online communication for protest mobilization and collective coordination. In this context, the previously discussed concept of choreography of assembly, formulated by Paolo Gerbaudo, is relevant.[35] Based on this term, social media platforms are not used only for spreading information, but also to guide and coordinate participation in physical protest events. Through posts and visual materials before, during and after the offline protests, social media became connected to forms of physical gathering and collective participation.

On RPS pages, multiple posts functioned as direct call to protest and public mobilization. These included announcements regarding demonstrations organized in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, such as protests related to Nakba Day on 16 May 2026, Palestinian Prisoner's Day on 18 April 2026 and Palestinian Land Day on 29 March 2026.[36] The posts frequently encouraged users to participate physically in demonstrations and share protest announcements. In many cases, the posts combined slogans, hashtags and the appeal to emotion and solidarity with symbolic communication, including emojis.

The role of the choreography of assembly was also visible on the social media pages of Queers for Palestine Romania, where protest-related posts included direct calls to participate in demonstrations, as well as protest chants and slogans indented to be used during public gatherings (Figure 2). The chants posted were in Romanian, English and Arabic and were accompanied by the watermelon symbol. Some examples include "Ceasefire now!", "When people

[35] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* 40.
[36] Solidaritate România-Palestina, Facebook page.

are occupied, resisting is justified!" and "With our souls, with our blood, we will defend you Palestine!".[37]

Figure 2. List of protest chants.

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Source: *Queers for Palestine România*, Facebook, accessed May 2026

Platform differences were also identified in the case of the choreography of assembly. While Facebook and Instagram relied more on posts distributed by activist pages and organizations, TikTok appeared more decentralized and strongly dependent on user-generated participation. In the case of TikTok, individual users posted protest-related videos, protest footage and direct calls to participate in demonstrations, accompanied by specific music, sounds and hashtags. Through these forms of communication, social media platforms functioned as instruments for organizing and coordinating physical collective action related to the Palestinian cause in Romania.

Another form of mobilization observed throughout the analysis was connected to the boycott practices and consumer behavior. Although this aspect does not fully correspond to Gerbaudo's concept of the choreography of assembly centered around physical protest

[37] Queers for Palestine România, "SCANDĂRI," Facebook post, October 12, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122180883986190322&set=pb.61555709677145.-2207520000.

gatherings, it similarly suggests the use of social media in the context of online movements to encourage forms of offline behavior. For example, on Instagram, the RPS page has a dedicated boycott highlight, which contains the brands targeted by the boycott campaigns (Figure 3).[38]

Figure 3. Instagram story promoting boycott lists



Source: *Solidaritate România-Palestina,* Instagram, accessed May 2026.

In addition, pages such as Boycott Romania were identified on Instagram, focusing specifically on promoting boycott practices related to the Palestinian cause. However, this page appears currently inactive, with only 3 followers and no posts (Figure 4).[39]

[38] Queers_for_palestine, Instagram profile.
[39] Boycottromania, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/boycottromania/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet.

Figure 4. Instagram account, included as an example of limited audience reach.



Source: *BoycottRomania*, Instagram, accessed May 2026.

5.2.4. Audience Dynamics

What also stood out during the analysis was the diversity of audience reactions and engagement patterns across the selected social media platforms. Comment sections, reactions and user interactions revealed both solidarity and strong disagreement, depending on the platform, audience and specific context of the post.

The most conflictual audience reactions were observed on Facebook, particularly in the comment sections of the RPS page. While supportive comments and solidarity messages were also present, many reactions expressed opposition toward pro-Palestine activism. Some users associated the movement with terrorism, questioning the legitimacy of the information shared by activist pages or referred to the content as "propaganda". Other comments included irony, sarcasm and trivial or unrelated reactions, as well as mocking GIFs and the "laughing" Facebook reaction. Moreover, offensive language was used towards both the activists and the other users participating in the discussion. In some cases, user questioned the authenticity of posts referring to civilian victims or humanitarian sufferings, while others defended the activist discourse and criticized Israeli military actions.

In contrast, audience dynamics on Instagram appeared comparatively more supportive and less conflictual. According to the analyzed material, the majority of the comments on the RPS Instagram page expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause through supportive messages, emotional reactions and symbolic emojis, although exceptions and disagreements were still present.

TikTok audience dynamics are more mixed and decentralized. While supportive comments and solidarity messages were observed, TikTok also included sarcastic reactions, ironic remarks and comments unrelated directly to the protest content itself. In addition, TikTok relied on platform-specific aspects, such as sounds, music, short-form videos and emotionally engaging visual formats, specifically in posts shared by individual users. Compared to Facebook and Instagram, TikTok interactions appeared more influenced by the entertainment-oriented platform culture, which could potentially indicate more performative forms of engagement.

6. Ethical Analysis and Discussion

6.1. Intentions and Consequences

As explained earlier in the theoretical framework of the paper, DDE is based on the distinction between intended consequences and harmful side effects that may emerge indirectly from an action. Therefore, the doctrine becomes relevant in situations where actions motivated by morally accepted intentions may also generate unintended negative consequences.[40] Many forms of analyzed pro-Palestine Romanian digital activism appeared to be motivated by humanitarian concern, solidarity and the desire to raise awareness regarding the situation of Palestinian civilians. This was visible through protest mobilization, donation campaigns, emotional discourse, calls for solidarity and the circulation of humanitarian narratives centered around civilian suffering and destruction. Through the lens of DDE, these forms of participation may be interpreted as actions guided by morally significant intentions, particularly in cases where users aim to express solidarity, encourage civic engagement or support humanitarian causes.

However, the analyzed material also illustrates how digital activism may generate unintended consequences within online environments. Specifically on Facebook, audience interactions became conflictual and polarized, including insults, sarcasm, hostile exchanges and accusations of propaganda or misinformation directed both toward activists and towards other users participating in discussions. Although these effects do not necessarily represent the indented objective of activist communication online, they may emerge as secondary consequences of the emotionally charged discourse and highly visible political content shared through social media platforms.

In addition, the structure and specific dynamics of these social media platforms may intensify the effects. The quick sharing of emotionally engaging content, combined with constant interaction and visibility, can contribute to emotional escalation and the amplification of tensions. Moreover, within digital environments, activists and users usually have limited control over how content is interpreted or discussed by larger audiences. Consequently, even when online participation is motivated by solidarity and humanitarian concern, the resulting forms of engagement may create ethical questions regarding the relationship between intention, visibility and social consequences.

6.2. Symbolic Participation and Performative Engagement

The concept of FOMO, specifically trait-FOMO, may also be relevant in the context of contemporary digital activism and social media participation. As discussed in the theoretical section of the paper, trait-FOMO refers to the persistent sensation of missing out on rewarding experiences or meaningful social interactions, being frequently associated with online environments and social media engagement.[41] In digital contexts, this can be understood through the example of individuals focusing intensively on the activities, opinions and forms of participation visible within their social circles and online communities.

In relation to the present case study, FOMO could represent a relevant interpretative perspective for understanding certain forms of online engagement connected to pro-Palestine digital activism in Romanian online spaces. Within highly visible online environments, with large

[40] Masek, "Intentions, Motives and the Doctrine of Double Effect," 567.
[41] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.

numbers of reactions and other forms of engagement, participation may sometimes be influenced not only by genuine identification or deep political understanding, but also by the desire to feel included in the online conversations, social groups or collective trends on social media platforms.

Engagement decisions on social media may not always be fully conscious, critically reflected upon or entirely assumed at an individual level, as participation can be influenced by factors such as FOMO. Consequently, some forms of digital participation can be interpreted as performative types of engagement, where users engage in visible online actions, partly because these actions are constantly observed, shared and socially reinforced within digital environments. Therefore, not only activists or content creators become part of the performative act, but also the audience itself, as users can experience forms of perceived or self-imposed social pressure to participate, react, repost or publicly position themselves in relation to visible online movements.

The present research does not claim that all forms of engagement identified within the analyzed material were motivated primarily by FOMO or performative intentions. However, FOMO might function as a possible interpretative factor capable of influencing certain forms of online participation and engagement within contemporary digital activism. This idea is important in online contexts, because users are constantly exposed to visible forms of collective participation, emotional discourse and easily shareable activist content.

A similar perspective is the concept of state-FOMO, also discussed in the theoretical framework of the paper. It refers to moment-based situations and offline social experiences.[42] In the context of digital activism and protest mobilization, this perspective helps explain why some individuals become motivated to participate physically in protests, demonstrations or collective gatherings after repeated exposure to highly visible forms of online mobilization and solidarity discourse. Additionally, this can be linked to Gerbaudo's choreography of assembly,[43] since digital platforms also contribute to the coordination and emotional encouragement of physical collective participation.

7. Conclusions

This research examined contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect, while also exploring the role of symbolic participation within social media environments. The analysis highlighted that contemporary digital activism is shaped not only by humanitarian intentions, solidarity and civic engagement, but also by the dynamics of visibility, emotional discourse and platform-specific forms of participation.

The research questions were answered through the findings, which suggest that social media platforms contribute significantly to the organization, visibility and circulation of contemporary protest movements, both online and offline. Through hashtags, symbolic communication, protest mobilization and audience interaction, digital environments facilitate collective participation and the dissemination of activist narratives. At the same time, the study highlighted how online engagement may also involve unintended consequences, including polarization, hostile interactions and performative forms of participation, as well as forms of engagement potentially influenced by FOMO, visibility and social pressure within digital environments.

[42] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.
[43] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets. Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, 40.

Moreover, the paper contributes to the growing literature on digital activism by applying DDE to contemporary forms of online protest participation, particularly within the Romanian context, which remains relatively underexplored in existing literature. The research also emphasizes the importance of studying social media environments in order to better understand contemporary socio-political behavior and patterns of symbolic engagement.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. Although the research attempted to maintain an objective and analytical perspective, studies focused on highly visible humanitarian and political movements may involve a certain degree of bias, particularly within emotionally charged online environments. Furthermore, the paper does not aim to evaluate the legitimacy of the broader political conflict or of the movement itself, but rather to examine patterns of participation and communication associated with digital activism. In addition, the analysis was qualitative and exploratory, relying on selected social media content rather than quantitative measurements or direct participant perspectives.

Lastly, future research could expand this topic through interviews with activists, page administrators and protest participants in order to better understand individual motivations, perceptions and forms of engagement within digital activism. Additional research could also focus more extensively on the role of algorithms, platform structures and visibility mechanisms in shaping online activism and symbolic participation. Comparative studies between platforms, countries or different activist movements could further contribute to understanding how digital protest behavior develops across different online and socio-political contexts.

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